



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., expresses appreciation to Navajo Nation Council for enacting historic legislation

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., expressed appreciation to the 20th Navajo Nation Council for “its productivity, its vision and its sense of history” in his fourth quarter State of the Navajo Nation Address here Monday.

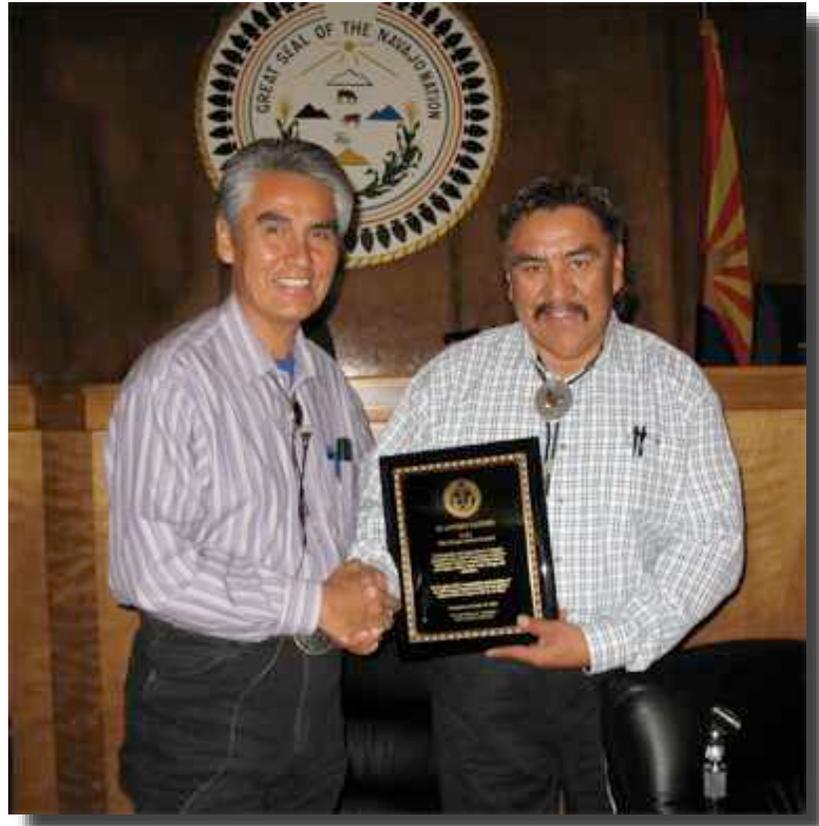
In his 20-minute speech, President Shirley praised the Council for its passage of the Bennett Freeze Intergovernmental Compact, the San Juan River Water Settlement, the Diné Natural Resources Protection Act and the Diné Sovereignty in Education Act, among other historic pieces of legislation it has passed this term.

In an unusual unanimous vote, the Council accepted the President’s report 69-to-0.

“Few could argue that this 20th Council was anything less than one of the most productive and proactive ever to serve,” he said. “The successes we’ve achieved together will have a positive impact on our people and our Nation for years to come.”

At the conclusion of his speech, he presented an appreciation plaque to Navajo Nation Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan. The plaque acknowledges the Council’s “historic legislation to forever sustain Navajo Nation sovereignty, culture, land, water, energy, and education.”

In a special session Sept. 26, the Council approved the Bennett Freeze Intergovernmental Compact by a vote of 75-to-3. On Oct. 11, the Hopi Tribal Council also approved the Compact by an 18-to-0 vote. The Compact calls for ending litigation between the tribes without any loss of land or relocation of residents. It also ensures religious rights are protected for members of both tribes.



Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., presents an appreciation plaque to Navajo Nation Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan on behalf of the entire Council. The plaque reads: "In Appreciation, to the 20th Navajo Nation Council. In recognition and appreciation of a highly productive term, and for its passage of historic legislation to forever sustain Navajo Nation sovereignty, culture, land, water, energy, and education. In the spirit of ké, I congratulate each member of this 20th Navajo Nation Council for his and her diligent efforts to improve life for all Diné."

The Compact is now expected to be signed by Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne and then U.S. District Judge Earl H. Carroll. After the judge’s signature, the 40-year-old Bennett Freeze will be lifted, allowing development and home construction to resume.

President Shirley said the Compact “returns us as a Nation to an era of personal friendships with our closest neighbors – the Hopi people – and forward to an era of Nation-to-Nation cooperation, understanding and common ground with those who seek what we seek: to find peace in their daily lives, to have their religious beliefs and way of life respected, and to live in harmony with their neighbors.”

He said the negotiation to achieve the Compact took four years. Many previous Councils and 11 Navajo chairmen and presidents have dealt with the Bennett Freeze issue, President Shirley said, but it was this Council that saw the end of the last major land dispute between the tribes.

He said that above all other actions taken, and hundreds of pieces of legislation entertained, “this single bold act will be what this Council is remembered for and the lasting legacy it leaves.”

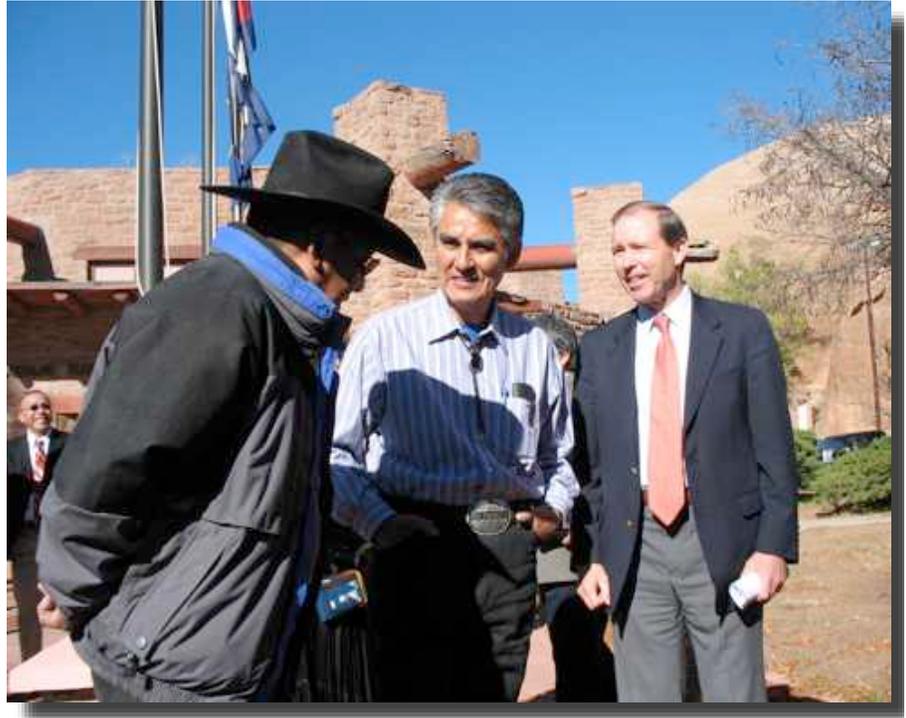
“We near the end of the long era of Navajo-Hopi land disputes,” he said. “We near the end of an era of harsh words and bitter disagreements. We near the end of an era of leaving our children no place to build their own home. But we near the start of an era that we can define together.”

The President also commended the Council for approving the San Juan River Water Rights Settlement, which he called the largest Native water rights agreement ever negotiated. He said the agreement was 10 years in the making and had been discussed for 20 years.

The Settlement would provide \$800 million for a water line project from the San Juan River to Gallup with spur lines to numerous Navajo communities. Congress must approve legislation for the project by the end of this year. If that occurs, the Interior secretary would have until the end of 2007 to implement the agreement.

A partial final decree would then be entered by the end of 2010. The hydrographic survey would be completed by the end of 2011, and the supplemental decree by the end of 2012. Construction would not be completed until the end of 2020.

The President acknowledged the Navajo Nation Council Resources Committee and Chairman George Arthur for their work on both the San Juan River Settlement and the Diné Natural Resources Protection Act, which he said “brought world-wide attention to the Navajo Nation for its brave and selfless defense of a huge number of our people – former uranium miners and their families.”



Congressman Tom Udall visits with Navajos before addressing the Navajo Nation Council on Monday following President Shirley's State of the Navajo Nation Address.

The law reinforced Navajo Nation sovereignty, the President said, adding “never again will we allow our people to be made ill, be crippled, and have the joy of their later years stolen from them. No longer will merely supporting one’s family result in cancer that causes a horrible death so that others may have the uranium that was placed under our lands.”

The President said another historic law this Council passed was the Diné Sovereignty in Education Act. The law elevated the Navajo Division of Education to a department, established the first Navajo Nation Board of Education and created the Office of Navajo Superintendent of Schools.

“This legislation fulfills the vision of our leaders going back to Manuelito and the signers of the Treaty of 1868,” President Shirley said. “Education should be everyone’s first priority, for through education we resolve differences. For our youth, education remains the best way to achieve their measure of personal sovereignty and independence, to help their own families, and to eventually contribute to the betterment of their community, their chapter and the Navajo Nation.”

On other issues, the President reported that the federal Administration for Children and Families had restored funding for Navajo Nation Head Start. He said the program will fully resume on Oct. 23.

“The overall result of this painful experience is that a better, stronger, more accountable program has been created,” he said.

He called the Council’s approval of the \$2.5 billion Desert Rock Energy Project and the Navajo Transmission Project “the single most important step” it could have taken for the Navajo economy.

“It is widely acknowledged that the Desert Rock Project will use the cleanest technology available, will produce the least harmful air emissions possible, will use a fraction of the water now used by other power plants, and will generate needed electricity for the Southwest,” he said.

He said construction is expected to begin in 2007 and that the Nation can look forward to upwards of 1,000 high-paying Navajo jobs and 400 permanent jobs when the plant comes on-line. The Nation expects to receive millions of dollars in additional revenue from the project.

“No other single project imaginable can match the economic muscle of Desert Rock nor add similar strength to the Navajo economy,” President Shirley said.

He said new Navajo Business Site Leasing regulations that remove the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the leasing process “represents one of the most significant economic steps for the Navajo Nation in decades, and is a huge gain for Navajo Nation sovereignty.”

He also reported that a federal district court in Phoenix last month dismissed a lawsuit filed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that challenged the Navajo Preference in Employment Act.

He said the Navajo Division of Community Development’s Housing Improvement Program:

- Constructed approximately 221 homes across the Nation totaling \$13.4 million.
- The Community Development Block Grant Department completed 698 power-line extensions for homes, totaling more than \$12.9 million.
- The Department also completed 794 waterline extensions to homes totaling more than \$13.6 million.
- The Design and Engineering Services assisted with the design and construction of 21 facilities throughout the Nation totaling more than \$15.2 million.
- The Capital Improvement Office, in coordination with our New Mexico chapters, secured approximately \$20.6 million of New Mexico State Capital Outlay Funds.
- The Navajo Department of Transportation has begun to implement the Navajo Nation Fuel Excise Tax and Road Funds, initiating approximately 123 road-related projects at a cost of over \$41.8 million.
- The Department received over \$5.1 million from the Federal Aviation Administration for airport projects throughout the Navajo Nation.
- The Administration Technology Department within the Division of Community Development received an award of \$642,515 from the Gates Foundation to replace computer hardware and software for each of the 110 chapters.

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